

# User feedback on the Stability Index

The Stability Index is an annual analysis by the Children's Commissioner’s Office (CCO) aiming to measure and highlight the issue of instability experienced by children looked after (CLA).

The Stability Index focuses on three main aspects of children’s experiences of care:

* How often a child **changes placement** (sourced from the SSDA903 CLA return)
* How often a child **changes school** (sourced from the School Census)
* How often a child’s **social worker changes** (sourced from a bespoke collection by the CCO)

The CCO have published four reports since 2017; the [latest edition](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/stability-index-2020/) in November 2020 related to CLA at 31 March 2019 but it did not contain information on social worker changes due to the disruption caused by COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst the CCO have since collected social worker changes data from all local authorities relating to 2018/19 and 2019/20, this has not yet been published.

The CCO and the DfE have agreed that going forward, the DfE will take ownership of analysis on children’s stability. DfE are planning to publish an update on the Explore Education Statistics (EES) platform in 2022 containing stability data for CLA on 31 March 2020 using the 2018/19 and 2019/20 data collected by CCO.

The handover from the CCO to the DfE has given the DfE the opportunity to conduct a full review into the methodology and measures reported while considering how it could be developed in the future. We are, therefore, seeking feedback on the Department’s plans to:

* develop a DfE Stability product
* bring the social worker stability data collection to the DfE

| Providing feedback  Your feedback will be valuable in helping us implement these proposals. Please send your feedback to [cla.stats@education.gov.uk](mailto:cla.stats@education.gov.uk) by 1 April 2022. |
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## Proposal 1: Publishing future stability data releases

### Background

Following on from the 2022 publication, DfE propose producing stability data for placements, schools and social workers using the most up to date data from the SSDA903 in line with the CLA statistical release.

### Proposal and rationale

At national level, the DfE proposes to keep the main headline measures and report across at least two consecutive years but reduce the amount of analysis concerning characteristics that explain only a small amount of variation in stability.   
  
We propose the following methodological changes:

* Cohort: reporting separately on children who have been in care for more than 12 months at 31 March. This would measure stability in the longer term so not to include children who have just started to be looked after for whom some change would be expected following initial assessments and implementing a care plan.
* Placement stability: Not counting children placed for adoption with their current foster carer as a placement change. This would align with the Department’s current methodology as published in the statistical release <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions>.

We propose reporting the main headline measures that form the core of CCO’s analysis:

* **instability**
  + A change in one or more areas
* **high instability**
  + two or more placement changes
  + a mid-term school move
  + two or more social worker changes
* **multiple** changes in **one or more areas**

All headlines would relate to national and local authority level.

We propose reporting the following periods for all measures:

* during the year
* across 2 years – number of changes across a two-year period
* consecutive years – does a child experience high instability in two consecutive years?
* year on year time series

We propose reducing the amount of analysis concerning CLA characteristics and other factors that explain only a small amount of variation in stability.

### Questions

You may find it helpful to consider these questions when providing feedback:

* What would be the value in the DfE continuing to publish the stability data in some form?
* How have you used the Stability Index and how often do you use it?
* Which measures are most valuable to you? Do you use these at national or LA level?
* What would be the impact or removing measures that you use?
* Are there any measures that you don’t use?
* Are there any new measures you feel DfE should consider adding?
* Which reporting periods (e.g. one year, across two years, consecutive years) do you find most useful?
* What characteristics breakdowns would you find most useful for:
  + placements?
  + schools?
  + professional support?

## Proposal 2: Bringing the social worker changes collection to the DfE

### Background

If the DfE were to include social worker stability as part of its new series, they would need to develop a method of securely collecting and storing data on the social worker changes. The DfE would propose to introduce an extra module to the existing looked after children annual collection rather than introducing a new standalone collection. DfE would work with local authorities and software suppliers to develop this module.

### Proposal and rationale

We propose:

* To introduce a new social worker module within the SSDA903 data return. The data would be collected via the same system but outside the main annual collection period. The main annual return would be submitted in the same way by the end of June and the social worker module would open mid-July and then extend until mid-October.
* To make the collection of social worker data timelier by collecting social worker information on the CLA within the collection year. This means that the social worker information would correspond to the same CLA cohort collected in that year’s SSDA903. This would allow the DfE to publish a stability series that uses the most up to date CLA data, a change from the previous Stability Index which included a one-year lag.
* Information collected within this module might include start and end dates of social worker episode, social worker ID and team code, along with child ID and UPN. We are also considering additional information to collect, particularly factors that have previously been shown to correlate significantly with social worker instability, such as on agency workers.
* Given the time required to develop the DfE series and develop the social worker module within the SSDA903 we are proposing that the first DfE collection of social worker data would (at the earliest) cover the year ending 31 March 2024. This would mean the new DfE series would relate to the 2024 reporting year (at the earliest).
* This does mean there will be a pause in reporting on stability as per the CCO Stability Index but as the headline measures have changed very little across the years and we think that trends are unlikely to change much during the gap.

### Questions

You may find it helpful to consider these questions when providing feedback:

* [For data providers] Would you be in favour of having the social worker collection straight after the SSDA903 return?
* [For data providers] How would the timing of the proposed social worker collection affect you? What timescales would work best for you?
* [For data providers] If asked to provide the same information as previously collected, would collecting via an SSDA903 module cause any additional burden to you compared with the previous collection?
* What would be the impact of a pause in production of the stability data?
* Is there any information currently not collected that would be useful in understanding stability in professional support?
* Do you have any alternative proposals that we should consider?

# Any other comments

In addition to the questions posed, we invite any other feedback that you think would be useful for us to consider.

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